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ON PAGE **A1**

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ISRAELI INDICTED IN POLLARD CASE GIVES UP HIS POST

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JERUSALEM, March 29 — The Israeli Air Force officer accused of recruiting an American intelligence analyst as a spy announced tonight that he was giving up his recent military promotion because of the problems it had caused between Israel and the United States.

But the officer, Col. Aviem Sella, indicated that he would remain in the Air Force in an undisclosed capacity.

Colonel Sella was indicted in Washington on March 3 by a Federal grand jury that said he was instrumental in setting in motion the activities of Jonathan Jay Pollard, an American naval intelligence analyst, in spying for Israel. The contact was said to have been made while the colonel was on a study leave at New York University.

Promotion at Issue

After Colonel Sella was promoted three weeks ago to command the Tel Nof air base, south of Tel Aviv, the United States announced that American military and civilian personnel would have nothing to do with the base as long as he was in charge.

In Washington, a senior Administration official said the Sella resignation was "a mildly positive sign." But the official said it "did not go to the heart of the matter," which he said was persistent refusal by the Israeli Government to cooperate fully in the Justice Department investigation of the Pollard affair.

Israeli officials said the colonel's resignation was a result of heavy pressure from some senior officials and from elements within the Israeli military.

Encouragement to Resign

According to senior Israeli officials, top members of the Government have been telling Colonel Sella for weeks, as one put it, that "it would be better for him, better for the country, better for the Air Force and better for relations with the United States if he would resign."

Tel Nof is one of the largest and most important bases in Israel, and a military figure said that after the American boycott was instituted, a "heavy atmosphere" descended on the base. Colleagues of Colonel Sella said he was in an unhappy and distracted state not conducive to the management of a major air base.

Israeli officials expressed great relief this evening that he had stepped down.

In his letter of resignation, which

was accepted by Maj. Gen. Amos Lapidot, the air force commander, Colonel Sella wrote: "The deterioration in United States-Israel relations and my concern for the future of those relations and the ties with United States Jewry have brought me to ask you to relieve me of my post as commander of Tel Nof base."

Colonel Sella went on to say that he was "flooded with requests by new recruits, friends inside and outside the air force and the general public, as well as American citizens, to stay."

"To my sorrow," he added, "I cannot accept their requests."

Tensions With U.S.

A decision by Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin to allow Colonel Sella to be promoted by the air force set in motion events that caused considerable tension both between Israel and the United States, and between some American Jews and some Israeli Jews.

Shortly after Mr. Pollard was arrested in November 1985, the United States Government sent a team of investigators, led by the State Department's top legal adviser, Abraham D. Sofaer, to interrogate Israeli officials known then to have been involved with Mr. Pollard.

At that time, Colonel Sella's name was not known to the American investigators, who concentrated their interrogations on Rafael Eitan, the head of the Defense Ministry's Bureau of Scientific Affairs and the man who oversaw the Pollard operation, as well as an Israeli science consul, Yosef Yagur, and the Israeli Embassy secretary, Irit Erb, who were also implicated. In their discussions with Mr. Sofaer's team, the Israelis reportedly made no mention of Colonel Sella.

But Israeli officials said that once Mr. Pollard realized that the Israelis were providing information that would ultimately lead to his indictment, he began telling his version of the story, bringing in Colonel Sella's name and describing what he said was the colonel's role as his recruiter and as a recorder of some secret documents Mr. Pollard funneled to Israel.

For several months Israeli officials negotiated with the Justice Depart-

ment over the question of granting immunity to Colonel Sella in return for his cooperation. In late February, while those discussions were under way, the United States learned that Colonel Sella, then commander of Rimon air base, a small American-built installation in the Negev, would be given the responsibility of commanding Tel Nof, a post that is considered a stepping stone to the position of commander of the air force.

A Talented Pilot

Colonel Sella, a computer expert, is considered one of the most talented pilots in the Israeli Air Force. He was the deputy commander of the 1981 Israeli air strike that destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in Baghdad and he was also one of the architects of the highly complex Israeli air raid that wiped out the Syrian surface-to-air missile network in Lebanon during the first week of the Israeli invasion in June 1982, Government officials said.

The United States Embassy in Tel Aviv is reported to have contacted Defense Minister Rabin and urged him not to allow Colonel Sella to be promoted, saying such a move would damage relations and undermine the Israeli as-

sertion that Colonel Sella and the other Israeli officials in the Pollard affair acted in an unauthorized capacity without the knowledge of the political leadership. But the promotion went through.

Colonel Sella was indicted March 3 on three Federal counts of espionage. A day later, Mr. Pollard was sentenced to life imprisonment for spying for Israel.